

Table 3-9: Matanuska-Susitna Borough Wage and Salary Employment, 1991 and 1999

	1991	% of Total	1999	% of Total
Total Employment	7,878	100.0	11,726	100.0
Mining	162	2.1	25	0.2
Construction	397	5.0	1,043	8.9
Manufacturing	95	1.2	128	1.1
Transportation, Communication, Utilities	784	10.0	819	7.0
Trade, total	2,012	25.5	3,310	28.2
Wholesale Trade	133	1.7	297	2.5
Retail Trade	1,879	23.9	3,013	25.7
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	195	2.5	347	3.0
Services	1,540	19.5	3,018	25.7
Government, total	2,640	33.5	2,909	24.8
Federal	107	1.4	148	1.3
State	810	10.3	829	7.1
Local	1,723	21.9	1,932	16.5
Misc./Unclassified	53	0.7	128	1.1

Source: Fried 2000

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough and Its Northern Communities

Historically, mining and agriculture were the economic activities that brought people to the Mat-Su Borough. In fact, the borough is still the state's biggest agriculture producer. However, in the context of a rapidly growing population, agriculture has become relatively unimportant, amounting to only \$9 million in production in 1998 (Fried 2000). Now, the rapid population increase in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough is directly linked to the export of labor, particularly to Anchorage. In 1990, the census estimated that 28 percent of borough residents could be working in Anchorage; in 1998, a new report estimated that the number had climbed to 38 percent even as the overall population increased. In addition, and estimated 10 percent of borough residents commute long distances to work in the oil industry on the North Slope, in the fishing industry in Bristol Bay, or in construction around the state. The comparative affordability of housing is one of the primary factors attracting residents to the Mat-Su Valley (Fried 2000).

Because labor is the borough's major export, it is unsurprising that services and retail dominate employment within the boundaries of the borough itself. Expansion in these sectors over the last decade means that more income is retained in the borough instead of leaking out to Anchorage and elsewhere. Construction and the finance-insurance-real estate sectors have also prospered from residential and commercial construction. Table 3-9 shows wage and salary employment for the Matanuska-Susitna Borough for 1991 and 2000.

The tourism industry is also strong in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, although its character is different from the rest of the state. The visitor industry in Mat-Su caters in large part to Alaskans and others who have recreational property in the borough. According to the 2000 census, 19.2 percent of the housing in the borough is recreational or seasonal, and hundreds of new cabins are added each year. The owners of these recreational properties buy services and pay property taxes.

While Denali-bound visitors spend some money for food and gas on the way through the borough, only the northern communities of Trapper Creek and particularly Talkeetna are tied directly to the park economically. For several decades, Talkeetna has been the gateway to Denali for mountaineers who fly from the town airstrip into the Alaska Range to climb Mount McKinley or adventure on other peaks or glaciers. Although this type of visitor traffic has had considerable effect on Talkeetna's character, the number of people entering the park this way has always been relatively minor (see below under Visitor Activities). However, other visitors come to the town to enjoy the mountain views, take flightseeing trips over the park, listen to stories of mountaineers and bush pilots, and experience life in a small Alaska town. This kind of tourism is growing dramatically with increased interest in "South Denali." In 1992, the Talkeetna Visitor Impact Assessment estimated that 40,000 visitors came to Talkeetna over the course of a year. For 2001, Christopher Beck & Associates estimated 110,000